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ABSTRACT

Membership in a library system, consortium, council, or network can affect a library's circulation in a number of ways that, in turn, impact on the library's space requirements. Reciprocal borrowing privileges may change the library use patterns of patrons, increasing traffic in an especially convenient, or well-supplied library. A reciprocal return policy, allowing items borrowed in one library to be returned to another, requires additional space in member libraries for sorting and holding books and facilities for shipping them back to their owners. The creation of identical or compatible circulation systems for all member libraries can involve a complete change in policy for an individual library with accompanying changes in space requirements. If the system develops a centralized circulation control system, most of the libraries will be relieved of various tasks and should be able to save some space, but the library housing the centralized operations will need greatly increased staff and space. Finally, should the system opt for an automated circulation system, substantial changes in service patterns and space needs can be expected by all member libraries. (PF)

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CIRCULATION, SYSTEMS, AND SPACE: A Commentary on Interrelationships

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While there are a number of ways in which membership in a library system or cooperative affects circulation, not all of them seem, at first glance, to require major changes in space allocation or arrangement. But, as we all know, library functions are so interdependent that it is possible that even a minor change in circulation may start a chain reaction which will indeed result in a revised plan for a new building, in the need for an annex or structural addition, or at least in the reallocation of internal space arrangements.

Let us look first, then, at possible circulation changes which membership in a cooperative may entail. I shall use the term "cooperative" here, since I have discovered that different types of cooperatives use different terms. Public Library groups tend to be called "systems," academic libraries seem to prefer to belong to "consortia," and multi-type organizations, such as the one I am connected with, seem most frequently to be termed"councils." But they are all cooperatives. What, then, may be the effect on circulation of a library's membership in a cooperative? I shall try to identify some of these effects first, then move on to consider what, if any, space changes might be involved.

A cooperative may change your library's circulation patterns by undertaking one or more activities. It is unlikely that any one cooperative would embark on all these changes, but fairly probable that at least one or two of these circulation-related agreements may be proposed and implemented. The major one is assigned to another speaker--interlibrary loan. I shall confine my remarks to common or garden variety of circulation, such as takes place daily in all but reference libraries. Included here will be not only charging and return functions, but also retrieval of overdues and return of circulated materials to their proper places on the shelves. Among the possible changes, then, are the following:

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1. Reciprocal use. Your cooperative may now give users of other libraries free circulation privileges in yours, and your own users free circulation privileges in theirs.

2. Reciprocal returns. It may become possible, through your cooperative, for materials to be returned to your library which were borrowed from another member library. Conversely, your materials may be returned somewhere else.

3. Your cooperative may, in the interests of reciprocal use, adopt identical or at least compatible circulation systems in all member libraries.

4. The cooperative may develop, as one of its projects, a centralized circulation control system, in which one library may send out overdue notices and keep delinquency records for all.

5. The cooperative may determine on an automated system, in which all holdings of member libraries are stored and through which all circulation is recorded.

In a sense, these five operations move from the simple to the complex. Each may require some adjustments in space. Some will have a major effect on space utilization. Now that we have enumerated them, let us look at each in turn.

The first, you remember, is reciprocal use. Users from your fellow member libraries of the cooperative will now enter your building and use its collection as their own. They will borrow your library's materials, either completely as freely as your own borrowers, or under a special arrangement. Special arrangements most frequently are made for items such as films, recordings, sometimes best sellers in public libraries, and for materials on reserve for class use in academic libraries. The trend, however, is for complete privileges for members of the cooperative, when direct circulation - as opposed to interlibrary loan - is in question.

These new users will be introduced by their own library card in a member library, or sometimes by a special courtesy card or Infopass. A number of interesting complications can arise from reciprocal use, but not many of them seem to have major space implications. If compensation for netlenders is contemplated, you will need some way of identifying out-of-town or off-campus users. Someone will have to check these records and will need work space. Probably, however, this work will be done by your existing staff. More space,

therefore, will probably not be required. Unless, of course, you are the largest, most centrally located, best-supplied with materials, all around most desirable library in the group!

Before each of you rises up to assure me that your library is indeed all that, let me remind you that each of your fellow members may feel the same way. The experience of most cooperatives demonstrates that, contrary to general expectation, hordes of "foreign" users do not immediately descend upon any one library, requiring more space for lines at the loan desk, more work space, more equipment, more staff. If you gain a few users from some of your neighbors, you may also lose a few to other libraries. What seems to happen is that there is, at first, a flurry of reciprocal use, as people learn of their new privileges and visit each of the libraries in turn. Once their curiosity is satisfied, they settle down with their own, or with one of the others, or develop a pattern that fits their working and shopping habits. Some do continue to move about quite a bit, but in general the first few months of reciprocity should not be taken as the norm. All these patterns, of course, depend a great deal on geography. If your members are close to one another, there will be more use.

Reciprocal returns are a different proposition. Here, your circulation area must accommodate materials which must be separated out from your own which are bound for the shelves. Reciprocal returns may also take a little longer at the return desk, depending on the type of records that the cooperative wishes to keep. But public space should not be seriously affected. You will, however, need space for sorting the home sheep from the reciprocal goats, and space for sorting and storing the latter until picked up by the cooperative's delivery system. Frequency of delivery, amount of reciprocity and number of member libraries are the major variables which will need to be taken into account in estimating how much space you will need. Space for storing, and especially sorting, should be greater than the amount of space needed for shelving the same number of books, as I am sure you are aware. Bins are good for holding the sorted materials, if space can be found for these. You will be sending other items to member libraries, and these items can be held together in whatever containers the system uses.

Location of the sorting and storing space for reciprocal returns is also a problem to be considered. It is not wise to place these returns with your own books awaiting shelving on open browsing shelves for the public. There can be a sizable volume to be considered; our own cooperative runs to around 4,000 items a month. These are not evenly distributed among the members. Often it is the smaller libraries which receive the most returned items. Once a pattern is established, it is our experience that users tend to borrow these items away from their home libraries - most often probably from a library convenient to work or on the homeward route - and return them at their own neighborhood libraries. There may, therefore, be a good many books to be sorted out, in the preliminary rough sorting that separates your own books from those of others, then they must be resorted by owner, then held until picked up or sent out on your own truck.

The first sorting might be done at the circulation desk, onto book trucks, and the storage should be near your shipping operations. The second sorting is probably better located near shipping, also.

Compared with reciprocal use, it is interesting to note that reciprocal returns seem to grow in volume, at least in a cooperative of geographically nearby libraries. Reciprocal use, I noted, seems to slacken off after a first flurry of activity. There does seem to be a paradox here, since reciprocal return, like reciprocal use, involves the physical entry into two libraries. But many returns seem to take place as a convenience, with no borrowing from the library so used. Book drops tend to attract reciprocal returns.

If your cooperative votes to have an identical circulation system for all members, you may be called upon to make the same kinds of space changes you would have made had you decided on your own to change your circulation system, what the common denominator circulation system will be is difficult to guess; in fact, this matter of arranging for an identical circulation system is not as simple as it appears at first glance. If you are planning a building now, and expect to join a cooperative later, it is indeed hard to tell what to expect. Libraries of different sizes find different systems appropriate for their needs, so do libraries of different types. In fact, a cooperative which includes both public and academic libraries seems to me unlikely to seek compatability because

their circulation systems are really called upon for different types of information. The academic library needs to know who has what at all times, including both the materials Professor X has had in his office for six years and the document a freshman took out yesterday. The public library, on the other hand, needs only to know whom to send an overdue notice and who has the best sellers on the waiting list that should not be reshelved when returned. A single file with edge notched cards for date takes care of the college or university library that cannot afford a daily computer printout, while the public library will tend to keep records, whether on [illegible] or film, by date.

This change, therefore, may be discussed for [illegible]g time before it is finally implemented. If it does take place, you may need new electric or telephone connections, including in-Wats or foreign exchange lines if your cooperative goes the route toward a fully automated system. Most cooperatives containing libraries in the middle size range will probably not make such an expensive change. But some changes will probably be required. If you have given up borrowers' cards, you may have to restore them. Or, if you have had them, you may be able to save some space by dropping them. If a transaction type system is selected, you will need space for storing large numbers of sequentially numbered transaction cards. You will probably need outlets for photographic charging machine and for reading machines for the film. But you will no longer be slipping or carding returned books, so should save some space in the circulation area from that operation. If you have kept a file of borrowers, you may be able to stop doing so; if you have long since stopped, you may have to start again. If you have used a system which does not require any borrowers' card, your system may institute a universal card, which you, too, will need to adopt.

If a centralized circulation control system is undertaken for you by your cooperative, you will save space. No more overdues sending, no more holding records of long outstanding loans. All this will be sent by you to the central control point. While this circumstance is usually a source of relief and pleasure, this and other circumstances which save you space may have more implications than you are at first aware. For practically all of these changes create changes in the work done in the circulation area, both at the desk itself and in the workroom or workspace behind the desk. If your staff no longer has to maintain certain files, or count cards, or slip returned books, there will

be a reallocation of tasks. Especially when the busywork reserved for slack periods at the circulation desk disappears, decisions will have to be made which may affect space in a way less closely related to circulation, but ultimately made necessary by circulation change. If you want your desk staff to put plastic jackets on new books during non-rush hours, you will need a table, plenty of space for books and supplies, an electric outlet for a pasting machine, and so forth. All this must be within sight and sound of the circulation desk. So do not breathe a sigh of relief when you are relieved of some of those irksome routines--think ahead and try to determine what operations might be done in the released time, including those that must be done near circulation operations, and those that might utilize whatever space you may be saving through the anticipated change.

So far, we have talked about centralized circulation control as something the cooperative is taking over for your library, all done for you at a central point. Suppose, however, that your library is that central point, and is undertaking the circulation control function for the entire system. This is a major operation, and space needs will be considerable. Assuming you are using transaction cards and something like a mechanized IBM sorting system, you will need space and outlets for a good deal of equipment, a large number of files, and a sizable staff. You may be required to maintain a coordinated user file for all members; at least, in all probability, you will keep a common delinquent file, to prevent book thieves from stripping all your libraries in turn of their favorite reading materials. This type of operation can be run satisfactorily in a separate building, in rented space. It need not be adjacent to the library. But you will need many and powerful electric outlets for the reading machines, typewriters, sorters and so forth. If you utilize an old building, make sure the floor will bear the weight of all this equipment. If you do operate in the library, noise may be a problem. Do what you can with accoustical materials, keep it as far as you can from reading areas and auditoriums. On the other hand, try to put it near the loading dock. And wherever it is, supply your workers with earplugs.

An automated system will present you with a terminal of some sort, which may tell your users what is in at any moment in any member library, and who has it. It should charge out your books, discharge them, and print out overdues for you when the time comes.

Depending on its use, you will need a number of terminals, for the new object may also be your catalog and a reference tool for bibliographic data. All sorts of possibilities with regard to space can be discerned in this operation, some of which are covered in other papers. If your total holdings are on line, you can close off your card catalog (with misgivings, perhaps). If you are only placing current acquisitions on line, you can still save space by filling catalog trays to capacity, since you will not be adding additional cards. In fact, your card catalog will shrink, because your older materials will be gradually withdrawn.

Terminals can be anywhere, not necessarily where the old catalog was. There must be some for staff use, some for public use. Some academic institutions have talked of putting them in dormitories and Student Unions. This sort of automation is, of course, sophisticated and expensive. Its possible space implications are enormous and not totally predictable. Many changes for users and for staff are virtually certain. My own university has studied users' willingness and ability to operate an OCLC terminal, and has found that they take to the new tool with great zest and little difficulty if clear instructions are posted nearby, and that staff is not called upon to help any oftener than with the card catalog. Similar results would probably be met with if a library initiated self-charging and discharging operations via a terminal. You have heard from another speaker about the types of outlet and special equipment you will need for an on-line cataloging operation. The same data base can be used for circulation, always with the proviso that more terminals will be needed for a combined operation of cataloging input, catalog use by users and staff, reference use for bibliographic data, location of interlibrary loans, and circulation functions.

Additional space may not in itself be needed, but there must be a re-arrangement of space. If possible, the various functions should be so grouped that they can take advantage of, and make the best use of, the minimum effective number of terminals.

This concludes the commentary on circulation, systems, and space. The changes and adjustments I have named are the only ones I could think of; probably some of you will be able to suggest more. Most of these changes (excepting the centralized operation and the computerized operation) do not require large amounts of new space. They will probably yield to the well-known ingenuity with which most of us have to squeeze new functions into old

quarters. There is surely no need to let space be in any way a deterrent to your library's entrance into a cooperative. But, of course, if you are so fortunate as to be planning a new building or a major addition, you should by all means take advantage of your luck to build for your future cooperation.